



July 11, 2012

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Rokita Fights to Protect Monticello Tourism and Economy

(Washington, D.C.) – U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita (IN-4) sent a letter today urging the Department of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to reconsider its decision on the Oakdale hydroelectric dam, due to the negative impact it will have on Monticello and surrounding communities.

In order to protect freshwater fanshell mussel populations that reside in Tippecanoe River beds, the USFWS ordered Northern Indiana Public Service Company (NIPSCO) to maintain water flow through the Oakdale hydroelectric dam. The order, however, will lower the water levels of White County's Lake Freeman, threatening annual tourism income for surrounding communities. Rokita issued the following statement regarding the USFWS order:

"The decision to lower the water levels will cause widespread hardship to Lake Freeman and the Monticello community. It will negatively affect small businesses that rely on tourism to the lake and a steady water level.

"While the order may protect the mussel, it will also absolutely hurt the Monticello economy. I am asking that the Department of Interior and USFWS find an alternative and responsible solution to protect the mussel population without damaging the Monticello economy during these tough economic times. I stand ready to work with the USFWS to find an alternative solution on this matter," said Rokita.

Rokita's letter was sent to Scott Pruitt, Field Supervisor in Bloomington for the USFWS, earlier today.

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Congress of the United States
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TODD ROKITA
4TH DISTRICT, INDIANA

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ROKITA.HOUSE.GOV

July 11, 2012

Scott Pruitt
Field Supervisor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Department of the Interior
620 South Walker Street
Bloomington, Indiana, 47403-2121

Delivered via email

Dear Supervisor Pruitt:

I write to you today regarding the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) decision to order Northern Indiana Public Service Company (NIPSCO) to maintain the water flow through the Oakdale hydroelectric dam. This order was designed to protect freshwater fanshell mussels that lie in the Tippecanoe River beds. However, this action will cause the lowering of Lake Freeman's water levels and unprecedented economic damages.

The decision to lower the water levels will cause widespread hardship to Lake Freeman and the Monticello community. It will negatively affect small businesses that rely on tourism to the lake and a steady water level. Due to the potentially low water levels, Madame Carroll's, a boat cruise operator, is in danger shutting down operations and Tall Timber Marina's customers are concerned about being able to put their boats in the water. The lowering of Lake Freeman's water level also poses danger to both boaters and swimmers as formerly underwater tree stumps now breach the water. This is an unnecessary and preventable hazard to those that use the lake.

The goal of the USFWS's order was to protect the fanshell mussel and, while that order undoubtedly will protect the mussel, it will also undoubtedly hurt the Lake Freeman economy and the surrounding areas. The reward of protecting the fanshell mussel does not outweigh the economic damage being done in these already tough economic times. I ask that you reconsider the USFWS's positions on the matter and look for other alternative solutions to this problem.

I look forward to hearing from you about my request for reconsideration. If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,

Todd Rokita
Member of Congress

CC: Daniel Ashe, Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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